

economy; there will be increases in Social Security and, of course, a big increase in Medicare because of the prescription drug benefit that the President is pushing. Yet at the same time, we do need to tighten our belts. That is the way to attack the deficit.

I am glad to see that the Democrats are interested in the deficit after all of these years. What I would hope is that we can come together on a bipartisan, wartime budget and put the interests of the troops first, of the economy, of homeland security, of our seniors, and yet, at the same time, tighten our belts here in Washington within the government bureaucracy. I look forward to that process.

#### THE BUDGET

(Mr. HONDA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HONDA. Mr. Speaker, my goodness, what a difference 2 years make.

Two years ago, Republicans argued that the projected \$5.6 trillion surplus was so huge and so certain that they could accommodate large tax cuts and increases in domestic spending, while still having enough to provide for unseen events. In fact, they even worried that the U.S. may pay off the public debt too quickly.

Today that \$5.6 trillion surplus is gone and has been replaced with deficits as far as the eyes can see. Our national public debt has risen to \$6.4 trillion, the highest amount in U.S. history.

In fiscal year 2002, American taxpayers spent \$333 billion paying interest charges on our national debt, which translates to nearly \$1 billion per day, every day.

That total is more than the government spends on education, transportation, child nutrition, homeland security, and the environment combined.

#### MEDICAL MALPRACTICE INSURANCE

(Mr. BALLANCE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BALLANCE. Mr. Speaker, the medical community is rightfully concerned about the rising cost of medical insurance, and I strongly agree that Congress needs to address this urgent issue. There are three key points to be made in responding to this important issue: First, reform the insurance industry; second, reduce frivolous lawsuits wherever they are to be found; and, third, reduce the number of medical errors made. I am advised by my research, by a small minority of 5 percent of the physicians.

The Republican bill's attempt to cap damage awards and blame the trial lawyers would achieve none of these goals.

The insurance companies victimize patients through denial of medical cov-

erage while doctors are severely gouged by staggering premiums. Caps only serve to further victimize patients without providing any relief to the medical profession. More importantly, in my opinion, caps take away our constitutional and time-honored right to trial by jury.

Mr. Speaker, I urge that we vote against this bill and let us pass a real medical malpractice reform bill.

#### SUPPORT CONYERS-DINGELL ALTERNATIVE

(Ms. LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H.R. 5. This bill claims to protect patients' rights but, in fact, it strips away the rights of patients, especially women, seniors, children, and lower income families.

It does protect someone, however. It protects HMOs, the insurance industry, and the pharmaceutical companies.

Medical malpractice is a serious issue, but so is medical error. Thousands of Americans die every year due to medical mistakes and thousands more are injured and placed at risk. The wrong limbs have been amputated. Improper transplants have been performed. These are real people, real examples, and real injuries and deaths, not frivolous lawsuits.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 5 would restrict the rights of such legitimately and seriously injured patients.

The Conyers-Dingell alternative offers meaningful reform without putting Americans at risk. Conyers-Dingell would eliminate frivolous lawsuits, increase competition, and reduce costs. It would address the crisis situation faced in some geographic areas, but not by sacrificing crucial protections.

I urge my colleagues to oppose H.R. 5 and to protect patients' rights by supporting Conyers-Dingell.

#### HEALTH CARE FOR THE UNINSURED AND THE HISPANIC HEALTH IMPROVEMENT ACT

(Mr. RODRIGUEZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the uninsured in America.

The number of uninsured in this Nation is alarming. Too many people continue to go without insurance coverage. The numbers right now range close to 41 million Americans who are uninsured. The majority of these individuals are hard-working Americans that make \$20,000 to \$30,000 and find themselves unable to pay for their prescriptions.

Tomorrow we will be filing a piece of legislation, the Hispanic Health Improvement Act. Hispanics are among the largest disproportionate number of uninsured, close to 31 percent. One out

of three Hispanics are uninsured, yet 80 percent of those that are uninsured are working Americans, working hard but unable to provide it.

The bill will provide an expansion not only to Medicaid, but also to SCHIP. It also will provide an increase in resources for those areas that disproportionately hit Hispanics such as diabetes, cancer, asthma, HIV/AIDS, and others. It also will provide an opportunity to provide access and affordability in the areas that are confronted. In addition to that, it also will strengthen the Nation's health care by allowing more opportunities for doctors and nurses to be included.

#### AMERICA NEEDS TAX RELIEF

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, America needs tax relief. The economy lost 308,000 jobs in February, one of the sharpest drops in recent memory. The unemployment rate now stands at 5.8 percent. While this is relatively low by historical standards, the unemployment rate was only 4 percent as recently as 2000.

Now, the President's economic growth package, I believe, is urgently needed to increase the number of jobs created in the United States. Private sector economists have drawn the same conclusion. The jobs growth package could create millions of new jobs. For example, the Macroeconomic Advisers estimate that the package would lead to the creation of nearly 2 million jobs by the end of 2004. The Business Roundtable puts the figure at more than 3 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should pass the Bush tax relief plan now.

#### THE BUDGET

(Ms. HOOLEY of Oregon asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. HOOLEY of Oregon. Mr. Speaker, as we are poised to go to war and as States like Oregon are drowning in deficits caused by the souring economy, we would think it would be more vital than ever to adopt a responsible budget, one at least that addresses reality.

Unfortunately, the budget produced by the majority this year has huge tax cuts that do not stimulate the economy and would enact across-the-board spending cuts, regardless of the value of the services: Schools, nursing homes, veterans health care, law enforcement, bridges, highways, ports, and that is just to name a few.

While here in Washington these may be just functions in a budget, at home they represent our local economy, national defense, and public good. We should have the courage to face these tough decisions on a case-by-case basis